

# 119

## MINISTRIES

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### **The Hebrew Root of Worship**

Worship.

A word in many religions. It's used all over the Scriptures as well.

In modern society, the word "worship" has come to have a variety of meanings and is often associated with singing certain types of songs, certain dances, specific music, and other such things. Many times the music we associate with worship evokes emotions that let us feel like we are connecting with YHWH. However, is that what worship is, biblically speaking? Does worship have to do with how we are feeling or the songs we sing?

Let's take a look.

### **WHAT IS "WORSHIP"...BIBLICALLY?**

What is worship? Is it possible that the word "worship" doesn't mean what we think it means?

In Hebrew, *shachah* (H7812) is the word used for worship. It carries a meaning "to bow down" or to give reverence, honor toward someone as a superior.

Right away there's something interesting to note, worship doesn't necessarily have anything to do with how we feel, nor is it something we experience. Worship is an action, to worship is to do something whether spiritually or physically; it's to place ourselves low in relation to another often as a sign of respect or honor. Honor is when we give something, or someone, weight or importance. We go more into this in our teaching [The Hebrew Root of Honor](#).

Another interesting thing is that men can be "worshiped," and this is not sinful or wrong. Worship is not an exclusively religious action.

**Genesis 23:7**

Abraham rose and **bowed** to the Hittites, the people of the land.

#### **Genesis 37:9**

Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, “Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were **bowing** down to me.”

#### **1 Kings 1:16**

Bathsheba bowed and paid **homage** to the king, and the king said, “What do you desire?”

These are just a few examples of where *shachah* is used. What this shows us is that “to worship” someone doesn’t necessarily have to have a religious connotation; it isn’t always about idolatry. Worship means to bow down before and give honor and respect to someone be it a man, YHWH, or a false god.

We find the same meanings when we look at the Greek word, *proskyneō* (G4352), used in both the Septuagint and the New Testament. Like *shachah*, it has the connotation of bowing down or giving honor and respect as you can see here.

#### **Matthew 2:11**

And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they **fell down and worshiped** him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

#### **Revelation 7:11**

And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they **fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped** God

#### **Acts 10:25**

When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and **fell down at his feet and worshiped** him.

In each of these examples we see the people bringing themselves low and showing honor and respect for the subject of their worship, whether it be the Messiah when he was born, YHWH, or Peter. Again, an act of worship is putting oneself low out of honor and respect for someone. No one interprets Cornelius’ actions as treating Peter as a god here: he was simply giving Peter honor and respect. There is nothing religious about it.

This is VERY different from how modern Western society defines worship, where it’s seen more as a religious ritual or extreme adoration.

The Hebraic understanding according to the context and culture shows us that worshipping is making oneself low, or bowing before another to show honor, respect, or reverence.

We would be remiss if we didn’t mention one other word sometimes translated as “worship” in the New Testament. We find the Greek term *sebo* (G4576) sometimes used where we have the English word for worship; but it is also related to someone being devout or a devoted follower of some deity.

#### **Matthew 15:9**

in vain do they **worship** me,  
teaching as doctrines the commandments of men

### Acts 17:17

So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the **devout** persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there.

### Acts 19:27

And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world **worship**.

In the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, the word is used a handful of times, but primarily to refer to someone having “fear” of the Lord. This is equivalent to the Hebrew word *yare* (H3373), which can mean both being afraid but also a reverent fear, an awe.

### Joshua 4:24

so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty, that you may **fear** the Lord your God forever.

### Jonah 1:9

And he said to them, “I am a Hebrew, and I **fear** the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.”

As we’ve discussed in other teachings, we need to make sure that we are defining words using the historical and cultural context in which they were written. We must strive to understand them in the same way the speaker and the intended audience understood them. How a word is used in society can change based upon the culture they’re in and the time period. So, we need to be careful to define terms within both their historical and cultural contexts. To do otherwise leads us away from the truth, not into it.

## PRAISE VS WORSHIP

As mentioned earlier, it’s not uncommon for some actions to be considered worship such as singing slow songs with arms raised at church that evoke certain emotions in us. That’s the case in modern times, however, while we read about singing and dancing in Scripture, we don’t necessarily see where it’s a form of worship. Usually where singing and dancing are mentioned in Scripture praise and rejoicing is what’s happening, sometimes praise is used in conjunction with worship.

### Psalms 66:4

“All the earth **worships** you  
and **sings praises** to you;  
they **sing praises** to your name.” Selah

### Psalms 138:1-2

I **give you thanks**, O Lord [YHWH], with my whole heart;  
before the gods I **sing your praise**;  
I **bow down** toward your holy temple  
and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness,  
for you have exalted above all things

your name and your word.

So praise and worship are two different things, but they can certainly go hand-in-hand. The two words most common Hebrew words translated as “praise” in the Old Testament are “*halal*” (H1984) and “*yadah*” (H3034). *Halal* can mean to sing, to glorify or simply to praise and relates to celebrating. *Yadah* is often used to mean to confess or give thanks, but it’s also used as “praise”.

There is a time to give praise, for example, when we enter into the Father’s courts.

#### **Psalms 100:4**

Enter his gates with thanksgiving,  
and his courts with praise!  
Give thanks to him; bless his name!

Praise glorifies YHWH, it gives thanks to Him for what He has done or given; it esteems and celebrates Him. Worship makes ourselves low; it’s when we humble ourselves before Him, giving honor, respect and reverence to Him. This is why it makes perfect sense to give praise and then to worship. Praise and worship are not mutually exclusive items, someone can only give praise, only worship, or do both as the psalmist does in Psalm 138. Let’s read it again.

#### **Psalm 138:1-2**

I give you thanks, O Lord [YHWH], with my whole heart;  
before the gods I sing your praise;  
I bow down toward your holy temple  
and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness,  
for you have exalted above all things  
your name and your word.

But, like worship, giving praise doesn’t **have** to be a religious practice. It’s possible to give praise to a person for doing a good job like you may do to encourage good behavior in a child. It isn’t worshipping them, and it isn’t a religious act.

Some may argue that praise and worship are the same thing. They may argue that when we give praise to someone, it’s like we are lifting them up, that we’re putting them higher than ourselves. So, whether we are lifting someone else up or making ourselves low before them, the end result is the same; that person is higher than we are so praise is the same as, or a type of, worship.

However, consider this. YHWH is the Most High. Can we lift up the Most High to an even more elevated position? No, we can’t; He is already the Most High, we cannot elevate Him any further. That’s why the idea that praise is lifting another up just cannot work, praise is not just lifting someone up. We can say, however, that lifting someone up can be a form of praise.

Let’s say you make a winning shot in a basketball game. Your teammates lift you up on their shoulders. They heap praises on you! They are giving you esteem, or glorifying what you did. They are not bowing before you or making themselves lower, which would be worship. They are literally lifting you up; starting as equals they then elevate you; there’s nothing religious about it; they’re celebrating.

Now let’s say you’re going before a king. What do you do? Do you walk up to the king and hoist him onto your shoulders and tell him how great he is and how he’s done so many good things?

No, you wouldn't. The king does not need to be lifted higher; he is the king and he is already as high as he can be. What you do before the king is acknowledge that he is the highest by making yourself low. Yes, you may still give him praises and flatter him hoping he will see you in a positive light, but you are not lifting him up. So, what would you do?

At the very least, you would probably bow or kneel, sometimes you might even lay prostrate on the floor in instances where you may be begging for your life. Why would you do this? To show respect; to acknowledge his position or authority.

Are you seeing the difference between giving praise and worship? How giving one esteem or praising someone is actually quite different than making yourself low before them?

If you come before the king and you do not bow, kneel, or make any other sign of obeisance or respect, what message are you sending?

You're saying that you will not bow; you're saying that you are equal to or better than them, that they are not an authority over you. You're displaying arrogance, not humility. You cannot give true worship and be arrogant toward the person you're supposed to be showing deference to, not really.

Praise is a good thing, so please don't misunderstand us. While we cannot lift the Father up any higher, we can and should give him praise.

Praise and worship are both important; there is a time and place for both. However, the spirit we adopt, and the approach we use for each is not necessarily the same.

So that leaves us with the question then, how is it that we can worship in spirit and truth the way the Father wants us to (John 4:23-24).

## **THE SPIRITUAL APPLICATION OF WORSHIP**

We've said many times that the physical actions teach us spiritual truths, just as a spiritual lesson can also teach us something in its physical (or literal) application. When it comes to worship, the physical action is to bow down or prostrate oneself. So, then, what is the spiritual application of this?"

The spiritual aspect would be our choosing to put ourselves under the authority of the Creator, revering Him, having a desire to follow Him because of who He is and His love for us. He wants our worship.

### **John 4:24**

God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

### **1 Samuel 12:24**

Only fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart. For consider what great things he has done for you.

### **John 9:31**

We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him.

**Matthew 4:10**

Then Jesus [Yeshua] said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written,

“You shall worship the Lord your God  
and him only shall you serve.”

**Ecclesiastes 12:13**

The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

Put plainly, it is the willingness to be obedient to YHWH, to His instructions, His Torah. Remember, the Law of God is spiritual according to Paul in Romans 7:14. Our desire to obey or disobey comes through our spirit. For more on what “spirit” is, please see our teaching [The Hebrew Root of Spirit](#).

Our desire to follow the Law of God, the Torah, is the spiritual action of worshipping Him. Choosing to be obedient to YHWH is how we can worship in spirit and truth but what might this look like?

The two greatest commandments are to love YHWH and to love others. So, when we choose to genuinely love others, it’s an act of worship toward the Father. Truly loving someone goes beyond simple actions, it requires the correct spirit behind it, that is, a proper attitude and desire. YHWH judges our hearts, our actions are a start, but if the motivation behind the actions is wrong, then the acts are worthless. Our attitudes that spring forth from our heart, matter.

**1 Corinthians 13:1-3**

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a ringing brass gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and I know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so that I can remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I parcel out all my possessions, and if I hand over my body in order that I will be burned, but do not have love, it benefits me nothing.

**Proverbs 16:2**

All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes,  
but the Lord [YHWH] weighs the spirit.

**Jeremiah 12:3a**

But you, O Lord [YHWH], know me;  
you see me, and test my heart toward you.

**Jeremiah 17:10**

“I the Lord [YHWH] search the heart  
and test the mind,  
to give every man according to his ways,  
according to the fruit of his deeds.”

In other words, YHWH looks at your attitude, your motivation...your heart, things that are unseen by the effects of them are seen. If we don’t have a proper motivation, then our acts are worthless and are not honoring the Father...they aren’t worship.

**Matthew 15:8-9**

“This people honors me with their lips,  
but their heart is far from me;  
in vain do they worship me,  
teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”

#### **Matthew 23:27-28**

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees—hypocrites!—because you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and of everything unclean! In the same way, **on the outside you also appear righteous** to people, but **inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness**.”

Abraham was performing a spiritual act of worship when he took Isaac to be sacrificed in obedience to the Creator’s command (Genesis 22:5), Messiah worshipped as he knelt and prayed in the Garden and submitted His will to that of the Father (Matthew 26:39). The prophet Daniel worshipped as he knelt before YHWH and prayed (Daniel 6:10).

Spiritual worship can be any act in which you put yourself below someone else, esteeming them, giving them honor. For this reason, it’s especially important to be careful of what we value, not only what we do. It doesn’t take much for us to make something an idol and give it greater importance than we should. For more on this topic and the second commandment, please see our teaching titled: [The 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment](#).

#### **IS IT OKAY TO WORSHIP MEN?**

With our new biblical understanding of worship, the question may be asked, “Are you saying it’s now okay to worship men, like in your king example?”

To answer that question let’s again look to Scripture to see what was lived out by YHWH’s people. In addition to worshipping the Creator and false gods, we do see men are “worshipped” at times. For example:

#### **Ruth 2:10**

Then she fell on her face, **bowing** to the ground, and said to him, “Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?”

#### **Psalms 29:2**

Ascribe to the Lord [YHWH] the glory due his name;  
**worship** the Lord [YHWH] in the splendor of holiness.

#### **Hebrews 11:21**

By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, **bowing** in worship over the head of his staff.

#### **Revelation 7:11**

And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and **worshiped** God

In all of these cases the same word is used to worship YHWH or to show respect and honor to another man.

Acts of worship such as bowing to a man, are not always bad things, sometimes they are simply a way to show respect. Even today we see this happen in some Asian cultures. They bow to one another as a sign of respect, not because they are viewing the other as some sort of god.

There is a time and place for everything. Sometimes an act of “worship” is simply a sign of respect toward a person, and that’s okay. What is wrong, is to worship any man or being in the manner you worship YHWH.

#### **Revelation 14:9-10**

And another third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself also will drink of the wine of the anger of God that has been mixed full strength in the cup of his wrath, and will be tortured with fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.

#### **Revelation 19:10**

And I fell down before his feet to worship him, and he said to me, “Do not do that! I am a fellow slave of you and of your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus [Yeshua]. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus [Yeshua] is the spirit of prophecy.”

#### **CONCLUSION**

The common, modern understanding of worship typically consists of slow “worship” music, maybe some dancing, raising your arms, or occasionally thanking YHWH or giving Him praise. Often this is done with the intention of evoking a specific emotional response. Sometimes, you might feel like you didn’t enter into worship if you didn’t experience these feelings. However, when we look to Scripture, its culture and context for a definition, we come up with something else. Yes, there can be songs or dancing or prayer that is worship, but that isn’t all there is to it. In fact, worshiping isn’t a set of emotions or a mood that we experience at all, worship is action. The idea that worship songs are slow and emotional while songs of praise are faster and have a happier feel is something made up. We would suggest that it doesn’t matter if the song is fast or slow, somber or bright, what matters is what you are doing that will determine if it’s worship or praise, or a combination.

However, our lives are to be lives of worship (Romans 12:1-2); how do we do this? Through our obedience to Him; following His words, His instructions. By putting His will above our own, we are worshiping our Creator, and doing so with the proper heart and attitude. This sentiment was echoed by Paul when he said whatever we do, we should do unto YHWH (Colossians 3, Ephesians 6).

So, do you want to worship your Creator in spirit and truth? Then do so by living your life submitted to His ways and His Word. Do you want to show additional adoration of Him and all that He has done? Fall on your knees before the Mighty One of Israel, bow your head and worship your Creator through your prayers. Live your life dedicated to the Creator and know that you’ll be worshipping Him the way He intended.

*We hope that this teaching has blessed you.*

*Remember, continue to test everything.  
Shalom!*

*For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at [www.testeverything.net](http://www.testeverything.net)*

**Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.**

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